

UPDATES FROM THE RUSSIAN FRONT

I'm working on a post on the fight over Congressional investigations into the Russian hack, but for the moment I wanted to point to two other pieces of news.

Buzzfeed gets sued

First, BuzzFeed is getting sued.

One of the people named in the partial Trump dossier published by BuzzFeed last month, Aleksej Gubarev, has sued for defamation to himself and his companies, which include the hosting company Webzilla. Gubarev also sued Christopher Steele in the UK. In an interview with CNN, Gubarev described the injury suffered as a result of the publication of the unredacted dossier.

The lawsuit criticizes BuzzFeed for publishing the memos, alleging that "BuzzFeed itself admitted it had no idea what – if anything – in the dossier was truthful."

Indeed, when the news website published the memos on January 10, it justified "publishing the full document so that Americans can make up their own minds about allegations about the president-elect that have circulated at the highest levels of the US government."

The lawsuit notes that the BuzzFeed story has been viewed almost six million times, and the news site has written eight follow-up articles that all link back to the unsubstantiated dossier.

Before he filed the lawsuit, Gubarev spoke to CNNMoney about the damage he had already experienced from the leaked dossier.

"I'm really damaged by this story. This is why I'm ready to spend money and go to court about this," he told CNNMoney in mid-January.

"I have a multimillion dollar business. Why do I need these connections with hackers?" he said, speaking by phone from the Mediterranean island of Cyprus where he lives. "It's absolutely not true, and I can go to the court and say this."

In his interview with CNNMoney, Gubarev said that three of XBT's European bank partners froze the company's \$5 million credit line because of reports about the memos. Gubarev declined to provide CNNMoney proof of those frozen credit lines.

After the suit got filed, BuzzFeed redacted Gubaev's names from the still-published dossier and apologized.

I'm interested in this development for several reasons. First, Donald Trump has repeatedly suggested that he might have sued Steele had the former British spy not gone into hiding. Furthermore, this feels a bit like Peter Thiel. So I wonder whether Gubarev has been advanced as a proxy to go after BuzzFeed.

Also, as noted, the (now-redacted) reference to Gubarev appears in the last entry of the partial dossier BuzzFeed published. As I explained, that last entry is significant because it post-dates any known sharing of the dossier on the part of Steele. That, plus some other aspects of the dossier as released, might have raised more caution in BuzzFeed about provenance before publication. If this suit goes forward, Gubarev would have an opportunity to probe these areas.

Wikileaks didn't release all DNC emails

Then there's this story, that reveals numerous DNC staffers and reporters have identified emails of theirs that didn't get released by WikiLeaks. While multiple people quoted in the story suggest the emails may have been curated to take out worthwhile context, they also admit that there was nothing "explosive" that was excluded.

The question of whether the emails were curated in some way, to appear as damaging as possible to the Democratic Party, has long been whispered about among campaign staffers.

"There was the fact that they were released in drips and drabs, and then, the fact that entire parts of an email chain were missing, which would have given a bit of context to the discussion, but a lot of us weren't about to say, 'Hey, you missed some emails!'" said one Democratic Party campaign staffer, who, like others, asked for anonymity to discuss the data breach while investigations continue.

"I think it is unknown that these emails were not just dumped, there was curation happening here," said another campaign staffer, who also requested anonymity in exchange for discussing the emails. "I would find part of an email chain, but not other parts. At times, the parts missing were the parts that would have given context to the whole discussion."

Still, he said, among the missing emails was nothing "explosive, or holy shit... a lot of it was mundane stuff or stuff that flushed out and gave context."

The implication in the story is that Wikileaks

curated the emails (and Assange did not answer BuzzFeed's query about the missing files).

"The idea that Wikileaks and Julian Assange is about some kind of high minded transparency is totally completely full of shit," said one former Democratic campaign staffer. "What they wanted was to create the maximum amount of political pain."

There is precedent for a time when Wikileaks did not publish the entire set of a known dataset – in 2012, when Wikileaks' version of the Syria files did not include a letter from a Syrian bank to a Russian one reflecting 2 billion Euro in deposits.

[T]he Syria Files should still contain the central bank's emails from Oct. 26, 2011, concerning its €2 billion and bank account in Moscow: For one, WikiLeaks has published several emails received by the same account (treasury@bcs.gov.sy) from that day. Secondly, the court records leaked to the Daily Dot reveal the Moscow bank's emails were, in fact, part of the larger backup file containing numerous emails currently found on the WikiLeaks site. One such email, discussed in depth by RevoluSec members more than nine months before the WikiLeaks release, details the transfer of €5 million from a bank in Frankfurt, Germany, to a European central bank in Austria, the recipient of the email being Central Bank of Syria.

When asked about the missing file, a WikiLeaks spox responded aggressively.

In response to a request for comment, WikiLeaks said the preceding account "is speculation and it is false." The spokesperson continued: "The release includes many emails referencing Syrian-

Russian relations. As a matter of long standing policy we do not comment on claimed sources. It is disappointing to see Daily Dot pushing the Hillary Clinton campaign's neo-McCarthyist conspiracy theories about critical media." (WikiLeaks threatened to retaliate against the reporters if they pursued the story: "Go right ahead," they said, "but you can be sure we will return the favour one day.")

[snip]

Asked about the possibility it could be duped, WikiLeaks responded flatly: "All Syria files obtained by WikiLeaks have been published and are authentic."

In both cases, of course, it is possible that WikiLeaks didn't get all of the documents.

Indeed, perhaps the most interesting detail in this new report – one noted without considering the implications of it – is that at least some staffers at DNC had emails set to delete after 30 days.

Many of the Democratic Party campaign staffers who spoke to BuzzFeed News said it was hard to tell exactly how many messages were missing, since their emails were set to automatically delete every 30 days.

The emails go back to early 2015. Yet GRU – the Russian intelligence service attributed with stealing these emails – didn't break in until March 2016. The emails would have been backed up (or perhaps not all staffers did have their emails set to delete). But the detail may suggest other things about how the emails obtained by Wikileaks were stolen.

Remember: when the emails were first released, FBI was unsure whether the emails hacked by GRU were the same ones released by Wikileaks.

Trump eyes Poland

Finally, to the actual Russian front. According to this review of Trump's foreign policy so far, his aides have been seeking information on an alleged incursion by Poland into Belarus, a close Russian ally.

According to one U.S. official, national security aides have sought information about Polish incursions in Belarus, an eyebrow-raising request because little evidence of such activities appears to exist. Poland is among the Eastern European nations worried about Trump's friendlier tone on Russia.

That suggests the aides in question are getting some wacky ideas from ... somewhere.